



THOMAS L. GARTHWAITE, M.D.
Director and Chief Medical Officer

FRED LEAF
Chief Operating Officer

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES
313 N. Figueroa Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012
(213) 240-8101

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Gloria Molina
First District

Yvonne Brathwaite Burke
Second District

Zev Yaroslavsky
Third District

Don Knabe
Fourth District

Michael D. Antonovich
Fifth District

March 25, 2003

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Thomas L. Garthwaite, M.D. *Thomas L. Garthwaite*
Director of Health Services and Chief Medical Officer

Jonathan E. Fielding, M.D., M.P.H. *Jonathan E. Fielding*
Director of Public Health and Health Officer

SUBJECT: SEVERE ACUTE RESPIRATORY SYNDROME

This is to provide you with an update regarding Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in Los Angeles County.

Background

SARS is a respiratory illness whose cause has not been definitely established. It is an apparent emerging infection that has recently been reported in a number of countries. It was identified as a potential serious respiratory illness by the World Health Organization (WHO) because it quickly progressed to pneumonia in many patients and because many cases appeared to be health care workers in Southeast Asia who had contracted the illness from patients. The main symptoms and signs of SARS include a fever greater than 38 degrees Celsius (100.4 degrees Fahrenheit) and cough, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing. Because the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is still working to identify the cause of SARS, a case definition has been issued. The case definition for SARS is:

- Fever ($>38^{\circ}\text{C}$ or 100.4°F);
- AND one or more signs or symptoms of respiratory illness including cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, or abnormal chest x-ray;
- AND one or more of the following:
 - History of travel to Hong Kong; Guangdong Province in the People's Republic of China; Hanoi, Vietnam; or Singapore, within ten days of symptom onset;

- Close contact with persons with respiratory illness having the above travel history. Close contact includes having cared for, having lived with, or having had direct contact with respiratory secretions and body fluids of a person with SARS.

Between February 1 and March 24, 2003 the WHO reported that there were 456 suspected and probable cases of SARS worldwide and 17 SARS related deaths. During the same period 37 cases were reported in the United States with no deaths associated with any of the cases.

SARS Surveillance and Awareness Activities

Following a travel alert issued by the WHO on March 15, 2003 the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services undertook the following to alert health care providers:

- On March 15, 2003 the Department began working with the LAX and port quarantine authorities to increase their level of awareness of SARS at the airport and to alert and help identify any passengers who may be experiencing this combination of symptoms. This included work regarding a Health Alert Card to be given to passengers arriving from concerning areas. The Department worked closely with the 911 receiving hospitals in Los Angeles County and issued an alert through the REDDINET and HASTEN alert systems to ensure that physicians and emergency departments and hospital infectious disease staff were aware of the symptoms of SARS and would immediately report any suspect cases of SARS to the Department's Acute Communicable Disease Control Program.
On March 15, 2003 the Department issued a press release to alert the public of SARS and provide physicians and health facilities with information regarding reporting of suspected cases.
- Advised Area Health Officers of travel alert and first case on March 17, 2003.
- Sent e-mail alert to community doctors on our health alert system March 18, 2003.

Following the initial WHO health alert it was important to reassure the public and provide accurate information that respiratory symptoms were very common at this time of year and no special actions were needed unless an individual met the SARS case definition.

The Department issued two press releases (March 15, 2003 and March 17, 2003) that resulted in television, radio and print coverage of SARS directing individuals to sources of additional information and emphasizing that recent travel to affected areas was required in order to meet the case definition for SARS.

We advised the Department's Health Information Hotline of the alert on March 17, 2003, providing the hotline staff with SARS related information to give to the public.

The Department began posting information for the public and health professionals regarding SARS on it's website www.lapublichealth.org/acd/sars.htm and maintain links to the most recent CDC and WHO information.

Investigation of Possible SARS Cases

To date Los Angeles County has reported two cases of illness to the CDC meeting the case definition of SARS. On March 15, 2003 we were notified by a local hospital that they had admitted an adult

patient with a suspected case of SARS. The individual had a recent travel history to affected areas and fit the case definition for SARS. The individual was released on March 20, 2003 in good condition. On March 17, 2003 we were notified that a child in the family of the initial patient also had experienced symptoms consistent with SARS. This patient was hospitalized overnight for observation and released March 18, 2003 in good condition.

Laboratory specimens from both patients were sent to the CDC for analysis. As of March 24, 2003 all specimens sent to the CDC were negative for both viral and bacterial pathogens. No other family members have reported symptoms of SARS since these patients became ill.

Physicians in the Department's Acute Communicable Disease Control Program continue to receive and follow-up on calls from both the public and medical community during the day and after-hours. In addition the Department maintains daily communication with the California Department of Health Services and the CDC.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please let either of us know.

TLG:JEF:al

tgjfSARS032803 mem rev

c: Chief Administrative Officer
County Counsel
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors